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First Year Experience Course Aids in Successful Transition of New Students

New two-unit course presented by UC San Diego colleges arms students with practical tools to navigate the campus

Before Uma Mahto began her freshman year at UC San Diego, she was both nervous and excited. She didn't know anyone on campus, nor did she know her way around. But she was confident that she would make the most of her college years. Fortunately, Mahto enrolled in UC San Diego's First Year Experience program, which is designed to prepare students for a successful transition and integration into a large research university. Today, she is flourishing as a member of the Muir College Council, a Resident Advisor and member of the [Jacobs School of Engineering Global TIES](#) program.

"I can now see how taking the course made me a more informed student," said Mahto. "There are so many opportunities at UC San Diego and the class certainly helped me navigate the campus."

Launched in 2014, the two-unit course was created to help new students thrive at UC San Diego by teaching them study skills, career development, how to choose a major and how to get involved in the UC San Diego community. The course, in keeping with the university's Strategic Plan, is also aimed at enhancing the campus's retention and graduation rates. Each undergraduate college offers the class, and most are taught by the Provosts themselves.

Thus far, more than 1,300 students from all six colleges have either enrolled in or completed the elective course, which is offered every fall and becoming increasingly popular with students.

Mahto, a third-year bioengineering major, recently shared her story with students who are currently enrolled in the First Year Experience course at Muir College, taught by Provost John Moore.

"Research has shown that students who complete a First Year Experience course are more positively challenged academically and more likely to engage in collaborative learning activities," said Moore. "These students also have shown that they interact more frequently and confidently with faculty, and perceive their campus environment as being more supportive."

As part of the course, the Provosts share their personal stories to help students also navigate a successful path through college.

Moore discussed how having extracurricular activities benefited him throughout his career. A professor of linguistics, he first enrolled in college at San Jose State University when he was 17, but admitted to the class that playing guitar was his main interest at the time. Moore decided to leave college to move to Spain and pursue his passion for flamenco guitar.



More than 100 students are enrolled in John Muir College's First Year Experience course this fall.



John Moore, Provost of John Muir College and professor of linguistics in UC San Diego's [Division of Social Sciences](#).

When he arrived in Spain at age 19, he went to a legendary dance studio in Madrid. "I remember walking in there and seeing all these accomplished dancers and guitarists, and I was so intimidated, I just turned around and walked away," Moore said. He eventually built up the courage to go back and became an integral part of the studio. "I think one of the takeaways here is that by getting involved and going outside your comfort zone, it makes you more resilient," he told the class of about 100 students.

Moore also relayed how living in Spain and learning the language eventually sparked his interest in linguistics. He re-enrolled in college and transferred to UC Santa Cruz, where he majored in the discipline (but continued to play guitar in his free time); he later earned a doctorate in linguistics.

As an undergraduate at the Santa Cruz campus, Moore got involved when the linguistics department was under the threat of being eliminated due to budget cuts.

“This was of course very upsetting to me and other students, so we held rallies and met with administrators,” Moore said. Their voices helped keep the department intact, and Moore said the experience was good training for his current role as an administrator.

“When I hear from students who want to make changes, I always remember that time in my life,” he said.

Kevin Farias, a freshman in Moore’s class, said getting practical advice directly from his Provost is a powerful educational tool.

“I really like hearing from the Provost and how he shares his life examples so we can learn what to do,” he said.

In addition to lectures, the First Year Experience course features a series of on-campus events intended to help new students maximize their educational experience, such as a talk by New York Times columnist Frank Bruni.

Mahto remembers participating in a resource center scavenger hunt for her First Year Experience course where she visited the Student Legal Services Center, Counseling and Psychological Services and other centers on campus.

“It was a great way to explore the campus and learn about valuable resources that UC San Diego has to support students, which I may have not known about otherwise,” she said.

The First Year Experience course is offered each fall. Associated events, which are designed to inform and help students navigate the challenges and opportunities during their first year and beyond, continue throughout Spring and Winter quarters. These events are open to all students. For more information, click [here](#).

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